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SUBJECT: INDONESIANS DEBATE ASIAN REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE,
CHINA'S ROLE

Classified By: DCM Ted Osius, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two recent foreign policy conferences in Jakarta showed Indonesian's ongoing reappraisal of Asian regional architecture and anxiety over China's sometimes heavy handed approach to regional diplomacy. The events also demonstrated Indonesians' interest in a strong U.S. role in Asian regional institutions and the increasing influence of Indonesian democracy on the country's foreign policy. END SUMMARY.

INDONESIAN PRIORITIES

¶2. (U) Discussions during two recent foreign policy and defense conferences in Jakarta highlighted the reappraisal of regional issues going on in Indonesia. Newly appointed Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa used the late November meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) to outline key priorities for Indonesian foreign policy. He noted that ASEAN needs to do more to deliver on goals and not just produce documents and plans of action. Otherwise, ASEAN risks a growing disconnect and cynicism. Indonesia also wanted the United States to remain engaged in the region. Natalegawa said that Indonesia's foreign policy will continue to focus on a "zero enemy, thousand friends" stance aimed at positive relations with virtually all partner nations.

¶3. (SBU) Natalegawa said that although Southeast Asia would remain the core of Indonesian foreign policy, Jakarta looked to have an impact on a wider global stage. The G20 could, he speculated, become a forum for handling non-economic matters. He also explained that Indonesia's domestic politics, particularly the increasing strength of the country's democratic institutions, was shaping foreign policy. This will result in policies that will increasingly promote human rights and good governance abroad. Democracy also requires Indonesian leaders to focus on foreign policy issues of interest to the public, such as greater protections for Indonesian workers overseas.

SOME ANGST ABOUT CHINA

¶4. (C) Anxiety about China's sometimes heavy-handed approach to regional diplomacy, and Indonesian wariness of it, was also on display at CSCAP. Chinese Ambassador to ASEAN Xue Hanqin used the forum to deliver an historically questionable speech about China's positive contributions to the region. She stressed Beijing's commitment to multilateralism and said China was largely responsible for peace and stability in Asia. In a not so veiled swipe at the United States, Ambassador Xue said China sought to bring Asian countries

together to counter outside influences. Citing time constraints, the Indonesian moderator cut short her presentation.

15. (C) During the subsequent discussion, Indonesian participants evinced a good deal of skepticism toward Xue's claims. Some observers called it "revisionist history" and one said it sounded like the Chinese were trying to form their own version of the WWII-era Japanese "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere." Indonesians, whose democratic political culture places great value on diversity, were clearly uncomfortable with the overtones of the Chinese presentation.

LOOKING TO THE UNITED STATES

16. (C) Indonesian anxieties about China and comfort with the United States were on display during a conference marking the tenth anniversary of the Habibie Center, a leading think tank. Much of the discussion focused on democracy given the role former President B.J. Habibie, founder of the center, in Indonesia's democratic transformation. Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia Zhang Qiyue joined the discussion to claim that China too was a democracy. Beijing's "liberation" of Tibet from feudal theocracy as one example of Beijing's alleged commitment to democracy, she asserted.

17. (C) Zhang's message did not resonate. Two Americans on the panel, former USG official Paul Wolfowitz and academic Bridget Welsh, pushed back on the democracy theme. They noted that democratic reforms in Indonesia, the Philippines,

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South Korea and Taiwan over the past several decades had dramatically changed the regional landscape. Wolfowitz said that democracy had to evolve in a manner consistent with a country's culture and traditions. Indonesia's democratic transition demonstrated that this was possible, thereby undercutting the argument that "Asian values" were incompatible with allegedly Western-style democracy. Welsh echoed this point and noted the increasing influence of Indonesian civil society groups in pushing the GOI to take a more assertive line on democracy promotion abroad. Both agreed that the United States was a critical partner in promoting democratic development in Asia--a message the Indonesian audience welcomed.

HUME